



ATTORNEY GENERAL OF TEXAS
GREG ABBOTT

May 3, 2005

Ms. Merri Schneider-Vogel
Bracewell & Giuliani, L.L.P.
711 Louisiana Street, Suite 2300
Houston, Texas 77002-2770

OR2005-03796

Dear Ms. Schneider-Vogel:

You ask whether certain information is subject to required public disclosure under chapter 552 of the Government Code. Your request was assigned ID# 226300.

The La Porte Independent School District (the "district"), which you represent, received a request for a copy of a letter to the district superintendent from the president of the district, notifying the superintendent of her proposed termination. You claim that the requested information is excepted from disclosure under sections 552.101 and 552.102 of the Government Code. We have considered the exceptions you claim and reviewed the submitted information.

Section 552.102(a) excepts from disclosure "information in a personnel file, the disclosure of which would constitute a clearly unwarranted invasion of personal privacy." Gov't Code § 552.102(a). In *Hubert v. Harte-Hanks Texas Newspapers*, 652 S.W.2d 546 (Tex. App.—Austin 1983, writ ref'd n.r.e.), the court ruled that the test to be applied to information claimed to be protected under section 552.102 is the same as the test formulated by the Texas Supreme Court in *Industrial Foundation v. Texas Industrial Accident Board* for information claimed to be protected under the doctrine of common-law privacy as incorporated by section 552.101 of the Government Code. See *Indus. Found. v. Tex. Indus. Accident Bd.*, 540 S.W.2d 668, 683-85 (Tex. 1976). Accordingly, we will consider your section 552.102 claim in the context of common-law privacy under section 552.101 of the Government Code.

Section 552.101 excepts "information considered to be confidential by law, either constitutional, statutory, or by judicial decision." Common-law privacy protects information

if (1) the information contains highly intimate or embarrassing facts, the publication of which would be highly objectionable to a reasonable person, and (2) the information is not of legitimate concern to the public. 540 S.W.2d at 685. The type of information considered intimate and embarrassing by the Texas Supreme Court in *Industrial Foundation* included information relating to sexual assault, pregnancy, mental or physical abuse in the workplace, illegitimate children, psychiatric treatment of mental disorders, attempted suicide, and injuries to sexual organs. *Id.* at 683.

In this case, the information you seek to withhold relates solely to the work conduct and job performance of a public employee and is therefore subject to a legitimate public interest. *See* Open Records Decision Nos. 470 (1987) (public employee's job performance does not generally constitute employee's private affairs), 455 (1987) (public employee's job performance or abilities generally not protected by privacy), 444 (1986) (public has legitimate interest in knowing reasons for dismissal, demotion, promotion, or resignation of public employee), 423 at 2 (1984) (scope of public employee privacy is narrow). Furthermore, the letter at issue does not contain any information of a highly intimate or embarrassing nature. Thus, based on our review of the information, we determine that the letter at issue is not protected by common-law privacy and is not excepted from disclosure on that basis.

We note that the letter includes the district superintendent's home address. Section 552.117(a)(1) of the Government Code excepts from disclosure the home addresses and telephone numbers, social security numbers, and family member information of current or former officials or employees of a governmental body who timely elect to keep this information confidential pursuant to section 552.024. Whether a particular piece of information is protected by section 552.117(a)(1) must be determined at the time the request for it is received by the governmental body. *See* Open Records Decision No. 530 at 5 (1989). In the event the district superintendent elected to keep her home address confidential prior to the date the district received the present request, the district must withhold the address pursuant to section 552.117(a)(1). Otherwise, the address must be released to the requestor. The remainder of the letter at issue is not excepted from required public disclosure and must be released to the requestor.

This letter ruling is limited to the particular records at issue in this request and limited to the facts as presented to us; therefore, this ruling must not be relied upon as a previous determination regarding any other records or any other circumstances.

This ruling triggers important deadlines regarding the rights and responsibilities of the governmental body and of the requestor. For example, governmental bodies are prohibited from asking the attorney general to reconsider this ruling. Gov't Code § 552.301(f). If the governmental body wants to challenge this ruling, the governmental body must appeal by filing suit in Travis County within 30 calendar days. *Id.* § 552.324(b). In order to get the full benefit of such an appeal, the governmental body must file suit within 10 calendar days.

Id. § 552.353(b)(3), (c). If the governmental body does not appeal this ruling and the governmental body does not comply with it, then both the requestor and the attorney general have the right to file suit against the governmental body to enforce this ruling. *Id.* § 552.321(a).

If this ruling requires the governmental body to release all or part of the requested information, the governmental body is responsible for taking the next step. Based on the statute, the attorney general expects that, upon receiving this ruling, the governmental body will either release the public records promptly pursuant to section 552.221(a) of the Government Code or file a lawsuit challenging this ruling pursuant to section 552.324 of the Government Code. If the governmental body fails to do one of these things, then the requestor should report that failure to the attorney general's Open Government Hotline, toll free, at (877) 673-6839. The requestor may also file a complaint with the district or county attorney. *Id.* § 552.3215(e).

If this ruling requires or permits the governmental body to withhold all or some of the requested information, the requestor can appeal that decision by suing the governmental body. *Id.* § 552.321(a); *Tex. Dep't of Pub. Safety v. Gilbreath*, 842 S.W.2d 408, 411 (Tex. App.—Austin 1992, no writ).

Please remember that under the Act the release of information triggers certain procedures for costs and charges to the requestor. If records are released in compliance with this ruling, be sure that all charges for the information are at or below the legal amounts. Questions or complaints about over-charging must be directed to Hadassah Schloss at the Texas Building and Procurement Commission at (512) 475-2497.

If the governmental body, the requestor, or any other person has questions or comments about this ruling, they may contact our office. We note that a third party may challenge this ruling by filing suit seeking to withhold information from a requestor. Gov't Code § 552.325. Although there is no statutory deadline for contacting us, the attorney general prefers to receive any comments within ten calendar days of the date of this ruling.

Sincerely,



David R. Saldivar
Assistant Attorney General
Open Records Division

DRS/seg

Ref: ID# 226300

Enc: Submitted documents

c: Mr. John Black
820 South 8th Street
La Porte, Texas 77571
(w/o enclosures)

Mr. Neal W. Adams
Adams, Lynch & Loftin, P.C.
1903 Central Drive, Suite 400
Bedford, Texas 76021-5813
(w/o enclosures)